

\$20 gold piece largest? No way

By Roger Boye

More questions from Tribune readers are answered this week.

Q — I have a bet going with a friend concerning the largest coin ever made in this country. I say it's the old \$20 gold piece, and he says the government also produced a \$50 gold piece. Who's right? — D.K., Chicago.

A — Your friend wins. Uncle Sam minted \$50 gold pieces in 1915 to honor the Panama-Pacific Exposition held that year in San Francisco. The coin contains nearly 2½ ounces of gold and features a goddess and an owl, both symbols of wisdom.

By the way, you'd have to pay nearly \$20,000 to buy the famous coin today.

Q — My uncle says that certain Lincoln cents are known as "cartridge pennies." Is this true, and what's important about them? — S.A., Janesville, Wis.

A — From 1944 to 1946, government workers made Lincoln sets out of copper and zinc that

was obtained by melting cartridge cases. As with most other Lincoln cents from the 1940s, cartridge pennies are relatively common.

Q — I have a Brasher doubloon, the famous gold coin minted by a friend of George Washington's in 1787. Seemingly, my coin is a copy of the original. If so, would it be worth anything? — A.B., St. Peter, Ill.

A — No. Almost always, replicas of rare coins are not collectors' items. Moreover, the copies should be marked as such to protect unsuspecting hobbyists.

Q — Is the government still making half-dollars? I hardly ever see them anymore. — R.S., Chicago.

A — Although the coins are rarely used in commerce, Uncle Sam is expected to produce about 50 million Kennedy half-dollars this year and a similar number in 1981.

Meanwhile, some lawmakers believe the coin is a relic of the past and should be abolished. Half dollars haven't circulated much.

Want to know how much your old coins or dollar bills are worth? Or do you have other questions about coin collecting? Send them to Roger Boye, Arts and Books, Chicago Tribune, 435 N. Michigan Av., Chicago, Ill. 60611. Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you want a personal reply.